

## “The World and the Two Churches” Mt 25:14-30

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.

So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Many make this mistake. What is it? There is this view that we can divide all people in only two groups. The good and the bad. But the Bible clearly distinguishes between three groups of people. That's right.

What are they? We can read about these groups in the Bible under different names. **One of them is often called the world.** That's the most obvious one. That is those who have nothing to do with the true God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. They may not know of Him at all, or they may have decided to ignore Him.

This is the group that tax collectors and prostitutes and all the other open sinners represent. However, these are the people who are most likely to listen to the Gospel, to hear about the gracious and loving God. For they know, they have experienced that they are sinners and they have suffered from it.

And then there are two more groups that may appear rather similar to human eye. How so? Because the difference between these two is not found so much in their external actions, as it is in their hearts. Yes, hearts!

One of these groups is represented by the most zealous of Jesus opponents, by the Pharisees, by the teachers of the Law and other religious people. In the eyes of the society, they all would be good people, moral people.

Often very religious people. But at the same time, remember! It was this group that were the fiercest enemies of Jesus. They hated Jesus so much that they crucified Him. **We could call them – the false church.**

False, because from the outside they may look like believers, they may actually be Church members, they are usually moral and respected, they serve a lot, and they usually know of their moral superiority.

This one is the hardest to reach. Their external goodness, their highly moral lives have hardened their hearts and so... they have no need or interest in God's grace. They don't feel a need or desire to be saved. They are too good for that.

Then there is the last group. A little flock. True followers of Jesus. Those who deny themselves and take their crosses. They know that they are not good on their own. Even if their lives often may appear beautiful and attractive from outside.

They know that they live by God's grace alone. They know that there is nothing they can boast about before the Holy God. So, they only boast in Christ. They recognize that those were their sins that nailed the Son of God to the cross.

They know that it is only thanks to Jesus, thanks to His sacrificial death that they have any hope for God's grace on the Last Day. They know that it is only by God's undeserved mercy that they have been called out of this world.

They cherish this wonderful gift of God, their salvation, more than anything. They strive to hold to this God, who has done so much for them. Most of all they fear to disappoint their God and Savior, to go against His will, they do their best to obey Him and please Him in everything that they do. Out of gratitude of the hearts!

They search for God's presence, and delight to listen when true God speaks to them in His Word, they consider it a wonderful privilege to come in the Lord's presence, in the Divine Service, where their gracious Lord gathers them to bless them.

And they daily rejoice in this incredible miracle, that God has made them, unworthy and rebellious creatures, His children, His heirs. For them to keep and to nourish

and to live out this new identity is at the very centre of their lives. **We can call them – one holy Christian and apostolic Church.**

See, the parable of the Talents, that we heard today, similarly as the parable of the Ten Virgins, that we heard the last Sunday, speaks about these last two groups. About the false church and about the true Church.

**Now what does Jesus teach us with the parable?** The true church in this parable is represented by first two servants, and the false church by the third servant. It is interesting how Jesus illustrates this difference between the one and the other.

First, the false church. Quite likely you have witnessed this difference in your lives as well. Have you met, or do you know of people, who may even believe that there is a god, who try to lead moral lives, but somehow are interested neither in Jesus nor in God's grace? There are quite a few of them around...

If asked about their relationships with God, they may respond with something like: "I have lived a decent life, I haven't done anything that wrong." I haven't done... anything that wrong! We could call their religion a religion of 'not-doing'.

Why so? For they have, consciously or unconsciously, this image of God as the Judge. **"Master, I knew you to be a hard man..."**. Therefore, their relationships with God are about not-doing-anything-wrong. **"I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground..."**.

They try to be moral people, helpful neighbours, useful members in community. But all of that is driven by this deep, inner need to be good. These are the Pharisees of our time. And because they are good in their own eyes, for them this Jesus and the grace of God are offensive in more than one way.

First, Jesus is offensive when He calls them to repentance. Why would they repent? What would they repent of? Remember, they haven't done anything seriously wrong. Second, Jesus and His Church is offensive to them, for this Jesus welcomes sinners, real sinners. He welcomes people who have done a lot of wrong.

True, Jesus welcomes everyone who responds to His invitation. With all their sins and failures, with all their weaknesses and imperfections, with all their ugly histories. Jesus welcomes people who are much worse than those moral people.

He welcomes those who have messed up their lives and lives of others. He welcomes those who have hurt others. He welcomes drunkards and addicts. He welcomes prostitutes and adulterers and sex offenders. He welcomes thieves and liars. He welcomes people who are not welcomed in good and pious circles.

Jesus welcomes people who are not as safe as the false church would want them to be. He welcomes everyone who comes with repentant heart. He welcomes all of us. Each one of you. Jesus welcomes those who don't deserve it, He welcomes them because of His grace. That is offensive.

Perhaps, you may have heard such good and moral people boasting that they are far better than many of the Christians that they know. And if we compare their lives with lives of many repentant sinners, they may be right. Sure! The scary thing is – that there is at least a little bit of the false church in each one of us. There is...

**Now, and what does Jesus teach about the true Church in this parable?** He teaches us **how to live out our new identity**, children of God. The true Church knows her God through Jesus as loving and gracious Father. We know Him as a forgiving God. We know Him as a God who delights in blessing His children.

And we also know Him as a God who has created us to be active in this world. **“He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.”** See, your Christian life is about taking all the talents that Jesus has entrusted to you and using them for the benefit of others.

Do you remember how Luther explains all the Commandments in the Small Catechism? They are not about not-doing, but about doing. You should fear, love and trust your God. You should pray and praise Him. You should gladly hear the Word of God and learn it.

You should honour, love and obey your parents. You should help your neighbour in every physical need. You should lead sexually pure and decent life. You should protect your neighbour’s possessions and income, etc. It is about being active.

Now, who do you think the owner of all the talents in that parable is? Of course, the Triune God. Whatever He has entrusted to us, it still belongs to Him. Whatever He has entrusted to you, He wants us to use it according to His will.

He wants us to be active. He wants us to be adventurous. He wants us to be passionate and daring. He wants us to be good stewards of His gifts. Of all His gifts. But we also need to ask what are these talents that are given to us?

Sure, it’s true that everything we have we have received from our Go... our gifts, skills, abilities, possession, etc. But, in this parable, is Jesus referring to something in general, or to something quite specific? What is the most precious treasure that Jesus wants us to “trade and make more”?

You know... It is His life-giving Gospel message. He has revealed us the truth. We know what our condition is, dead in our sins. We know that the Last Day is approaching. We know that on our we can’t stand in God’s judgement.

And we know to what painful length our God has gone to rescue us from death and hell. We know how much He has sacrificed, how much He loves you, that He didn’t spare even His own life to rescue you from eternal damnation and to have you with Him in His eternal kingdom of joy and blessedness and beauty.

This is His desire, that everyone would know the truth and would accept His invitation – to dwell with Him in New Heaven and New Earth. This is the most precious treasure entrusted to us, this is what we need to be “trading”.

We also can't shy away from the fact, that there will be different outcomes for different people. Not everyone ends at the same place. For the false church, that mostly cares about their own goodness and not-doing-anything-wrong, but rejects or ignores Jesus, the warning is harsh:

**“You wicked and lazy servants! You will be cast into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** But for the true Church, for the little flock that listens to their Master's voice, that trades His talents and does everything to please Him, the Risen Lord Jesus will speak these words:

**“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”** This is how blessed you are. The Triune God Himself has chosen you. He personally has called you.

He Himself has given His talents to you. He has sent you to use them according to His will. He has entrusted to us the Greatest Message ever. He has given us this new and active life of doing many things in service to our neighbours.

And He has promise that He will always be with you as we joyfully venture through this life. And, finally, to all His faithful, to His little flock, He has promised that you will enter His joy, and that your reward will be great in heaven.

This is why we, one holy Christian and apostolic Church, are here. To do the will of our Master, to trade His talents, to delight in His grace and promises, supporting one another and together waiting for the day of His return. For the day when we will enter His joy. Amen.